

## **AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGICAL MODELS IN SINACH'S "WAY MAKER": A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract**

African Christology seeks to articulate the meaning of Jesus Christ in categories that are intelligible and relevant to African Christian experience. This study examines the African Christological models embedded in Sinach's contemporary gospel song, "Way Maker," with

particular attention to the images of Christ as Way Maker, Promise Keeper, and Mender of Hearts. The study is motivated by the limited scholarly attention given to contemporary African gospel music as a significant source of theological reflection and Christological construction. Although gospel songs play an influential role in shaping Christian consciousness and worship across Africa, their contribution to contextual Christology remains comparatively underexplored. Using a qualitative method of lyrical and theological analysis, the study interprets selected expressions in "Way Maker" against the background of African contextual and functional Christology. The analysis demonstrates that the song presents Christ primarily in functional and experiential categories, emphasizing divine presence, intervention, faithfulness, healing, restoration, and hope. "Way Maker" portrays Christ as one who creates possibilities in situations of apparent impossibility, remains faithful to divine promises, and restores persons experiencing emotional and existential brokenness. The study argues that these representations resonate strongly with African Christian understandings of Christ as an active, present, compassionate, and transformative Lord. Gospel music, therefore, constitutes an important site for the development and transmission of contemporary African Christological thought.

**Keywords:** African Christology; African Theology; Gospel Music; Sinach; Way Maker; Contextual Theology; Functional Christology; Lived Religion.

## Introduction

Christology, as the theological study of the person and work of Jesus Christ, occupies a central place in Christian theology. The significance attributed to Jesus, however, is expressed differently across historical, cultural, and social contexts. While Christian faith affirms the universal significance of Christ, communities inevitably interpret and experience that significance through the categories available within their particular cultures and lived realities. This contextual dimension has been especially important in African Christianity, where theologians have sought to articulate the meaning of Christ in ways that engage African religious consciousness, social structures, historical experiences, and existential concerns.

The development of African Christology is therefore closely connected to the question of relevance. Christianity was introduced and expanded in Africa within missionary contexts that frequently presented the Christian faith through Western cultural and theological frameworks. African theologians subsequently questioned whether inherited formulations adequately addressed African experiences of community, kinship, suffering, healing, spiritual insecurity, oppression, and hope. The result was an increasing attempt to interpret Jesus through African categories without denying the central claims of Christian faith.

African Christology has consequently produced several contextual models, including Christ as Ancestor, Healer, Liberator, Chief, King, Elder Brother, and Reconstructor. Nyamiti's influential ancestor Christology, for example,

interprets Christ as the supreme ancestor who establishes and mediates a unique relationship between God and humanity (Nyamiti 1984). Bediako similarly emphasizes the importance of cultural identity and continuity in the development of African Christian theology. For him, Christianity in Africa cannot be adequately understood apart from the ways Africans have interpreted and appropriated the Christian gospel within their cultural worlds (Bediako, *Christianity in Africa* 1995).

Such developments demonstrate that African Christology is not simply a reproduction of Western theological formulations. It is an ongoing attempt to answer the question: Who is Jesus Christ for African Christians within their concrete circumstances? This question is particularly important because African Christian spirituality is often characterized by an experiential and functional understanding of faith. Christ is not encountered merely as a doctrinal proposition but as one, who heals, protects, delivers, provides, guides, restores, and sustains. Ogunlana and Akano observe that contemporary African Christology frequently emphasizes what Christ does in the practical lives of believers alongside questions concerning who Christ is ontologically (Ogunlana and Akano 2022).

One important but relatively underexamined location of this Christological expression is African gospel music. Music occupies a central place in African Christian worship, communication, evangelization, and religious formation. Through songs, theological ideas are memorized, performed, repeated, interpreted, and transmitted across generations. Bediako's emphasis on

the oral and contextual character of African Christianity provides a useful basis for taking popular Christian songs seriously as sites of theological reflection (Bediako 1995). Chernoff's discussion of African music also demonstrates the communal and participatory character of musical expression (Chernoff 1979). Music is therefore not merely entertainment within African Christianity; it can function as a vehicle for theological interpretation and religious experience.

Contemporary gospel music is especially significant in this regard. Gospel songs frequently employ biblical imagery alongside culturally accessible language to express believers' understanding of God's activity in their everyday lives. Such songs may articulate Christ as healer, protector, provider, deliverer, king, friend, or restorer. Boaheng's studies of contemporary African gospel songs demonstrate how popular Christian music can communicate theological ideas through metaphor, repetition, and culturally resonant imagery (Boaheng 2024).

Against this background, this article examines Sinach's "Way Maker" as a contemporary African Christian song that communicates a functional and experiential understanding of Christ. The song describes God as "Way Maker," "Miracle Worker," "Promise Keeper," and "Light in the Darkness," while also portraying the divine presence as one that touches, heals, turns lives around, and mends hearts. These images are particularly significant within African Christian spirituality, where divine intervention in concrete human circumstances is an important dimension of religious experience.

The study focuses particularly on three interconnected images: Way Maker, Promise Keeper, and Mender of Hearts. The third is interpreted through the biblical imagery of restoration and the potter-clay motif. The article argues that these images constitute meaningful African Christological expressions because they present Christ as actively involved in human existence rather than as a distant theological abstraction.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to:

- examine the Christological portrayal of Jesus in Sinach's "Way Maker" from an African theological perspective;
- identify the major Christological themes expressed through the song's lyrics; and
- analyze the theological significance of Christ as Way Maker, Promise Keeper, and Mender of Hearts within contemporary African Christianity.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology combining close lyrical analysis with contextual theological reflection. "Way Maker" was purposively selected as the primary text because of its wide reception in African and global Christian worship and its explicit, repeated use of functional divine titles (Way Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, Light in the Darkness). The song's lyrics were read closely, line by line, and the recurring images were grouped

thematically around three dominant Christological motifs — Way Maker, Promise Keeper, and Mender of Hearts — which were then read against relevant biblical texts and existing African Christological scholarship (notably Nyamiti's ancestor Christology, Bediako's contextual theology, and Ogunlana and Akano's ontological–functional distinction). This is a text-based hermeneutical study rather than an empirical reception study; it does not survey how individual worshippers interpret the song, and its interpretive claims should be read as one plausible theological reading among others rather than an exhaustive or statistically representative account.

### **African Christology and Gospel Music**

African Christology developed partly from the conviction that Christian theology must speak meaningfully to African realities. The emergence of contextual Christological models reflects the conviction that the universal Christ can be authentically interpreted through particular cultural categories.

Mbiti's writings were influential in demonstrating the significance of African communal, relational, and religious categories for Christian theology (Mbiti 1969). African religious thought, in his analysis, is deeply connected to community, kinship, ancestry, and the interaction between the visible and invisible dimensions of existence. Such categories inevitably influence how African Christians understand Jesus Christ.

Nyamiti's ancestor Christology represents one of the most prominent examples of this contextualization (Nyamiti 1984). He interprets Christ as the "Proto-Ancestor" whose relationship with humanity provides a theological bridge between African ancestral categories and Christian teaching about Christ's mediation. The significance of this model lies not simply in replacing one concept with another but in using an African cultural category to illuminate a Christian claim about Christ.

African Christology has also developed beyond ancestor Christology. Jesse N. K. Mugambi's emphasis on reconstruction presents Christianity as a resource for rebuilding African societies after colonialism and other forms of social disruption (Mugambi 1995). Gathogo similarly examines reconstructive approaches to African Christology, emphasizing the need for theology to engage contemporary African realities (Gathogo 2015). Garba's study of African spirituality further demonstrates the importance of practical and spiritual categories in interpreting Christ within African Christianity (Garba 2020).

The functional character of African Christology is particularly relevant to gospel music. Ogunlana and Akano distinguish between ontological and functional approaches to Christology and note the prominence of functional understandings within contemporary African Christianity (Ogunlana and Akano 2022). In this perspective, the question "Who is Christ?" is frequently intertwined with questions such as "What does Christ do?" and "How does Christ relate to the believer's concrete experience?"

Gospel music provides an effective medium for expressing these questions. Unlike theological treatises, songs communicate through repetition, metaphor, emotion, testimony, rhythm, and communal participation. Theological concepts are therefore not merely explained; they are sung and experienced.

Boaheng's analysis of "Igwe," for example, demonstrates how a contemporary African gospel song can articulate a Christology of kingship (Boaheng, "Kingship Christology," 2024). His study of "Yehowa" similarly demonstrates how repetition and metaphor can communicate divine attributes in popular Christian music (Boaheng, "Oral Theology in the African Church," 2024). Such studies establish that contemporary gospel songs can legitimately be treated as theological texts.

Kyama M. Mugambi's work on music and mission reinforces this position by highlighting the importance of song in communicating Christian beliefs (Mugambi 2023). Music makes theological ideas accessible to communities regardless of formal theological education. Sande's study of African Pentecostal worship further demonstrates how contemporary worship music can engage theological and social questions (Sande 2024).

Gospel music therefore constitutes a significant form of lived theology. It reveals not only what theologians write about Christ but also how ordinary Christians sing, experience, imagine, and proclaim Christ.

## **The Development of African Christological Models**

African Christological models emerged from the desire to express the Christian faith in categories that resonate with African cultural and religious experience. The development should not be understood as a rejection of Christianity's universal claims but as an attempt to contextualise those claims.

During the missionary period, Christianity was often associated with European cultural forms. African converts encountered Christian teachings within educational, liturgical, linguistic, and institutional structures largely inherited from missionary Christianity. As African Christian intellectuals developed their own theological voices, they began to ask how Christ could be interpreted using African concepts and experiences.

Bediako argues that African Christianity represents a renewal of Christianity outside its Western cultural location (Bediako 1995). His emphasis on Christian identity demonstrates that African Christianity is neither a cultural imitation nor a theological deviation but a genuine expression of the Christian faith within African history and culture.

Nyamiti's ancestor model is among the best-known examples. It recognizes the importance of ancestors in African traditional social structures and employs the concept to illuminate Christ's mediating and relational significance. Christ, however, is not simply equated with deceased ancestors; the model seeks to demonstrate how Christ fulfills and transcends the mediating functions associated with ancestry.

Other models emphasize different dimensions of African existence. Christ as Healer responds to the importance of health and wholeness. Christ as Liberator addresses oppression and injustice. Christ as Chief or King reflects African understandings of authority and leadership. Christ as Elder Brother emphasizes solidarity and relationality. Christ as Reconstructor speaks to social renewal and the rebuilding of communities.

These models share an important characteristic: they interpret Christ in relation to concrete human concerns. This functional dimension is particularly evident in contemporary African Pentecostal and gospel Christianity, where Jesus is frequently proclaimed as the one who heals sickness, provides employment, protects families, resolves difficulties, delivers people from spiritual oppression, and restores hope.

Such functional Christology does not necessarily contradict classical Christian Christology. Rather, it emphasizes particular aspects of Christ's identity that are especially meaningful within African existential contexts. Gospel music provides an important means through which these dimensions become part of popular Christian consciousness.

### **"Way Maker": Context and Theological Significance**

The song "Way Maker" is a contemporary Christian worship song written and originally performed by Nigerian gospel artist Osinachi Kalu Okoro Egbu, popularly known as Sinach. It was released in 2015 and subsequently gained international recognition through

numerous performances and translations. Its central refrain describes God as "Way Maker," "Miracle Worker," "Promise Keeper," and "Light in the Darkness." The song emerged from Sinach's personal Christian experience and subsequently became a widely used worship song. Its international reception demonstrates the capacity of African gospel music to transcend its original cultural setting while retaining elements of the African Christian experience from which it emerged. The song opens with an affirmation of divine presence, worshipping God as one who is actively "moving in our midst" rather than distant or inactive.

The emphasis is significant. The song does not begin with an abstract theological definition of God. Instead, it begins with presence and activity: God is here, moving, working, touching, healing, turning lives around, and mending every heart. The repeated declaration of divine activity provides the theological framework for understanding the titles that follow.

Although the lyrics primarily refer to "God" rather than explicitly naming Jesus, the song is situated within Christian worship and has been received within Christian contexts as a confession of God's saving and restorative activity. For the purpose of Christological analysis, therefore, the song can be read within the broader Christian confession that God's activity is revealed through Christ. This distinction is important because responsible theological interpretation should not attribute to the lyrics more explicit Christological language than they actually contain.

## **African Christological Models in "Way Maker"**

### **(i) Christ as Way Maker**

The expression "Way Maker" is the central metaphor of the song. It presents God as one who creates possibilities where human beings perceive obstacles and impossibilities. Within an African functional Christological framework, this imagery is particularly significant because it depicts divine power as active within everyday human existence.

The expression resonates with biblical imagery, especially Isaiah's language concerning God making a way in the wilderness (Isa. 43:19). The biblical image communicates divine intervention, transformation, and the creation of a new possibility where none appears to exist.

Within African Christian spirituality, the image becomes particularly powerful because human life is frequently interpreted through the categories of struggle, uncertainty, vulnerability, and hope. Economic hardship, illness, unemployment, family difficulties, insecurity, and social instability can create situations that believers describe as "impossible." In such contexts, the confession that Christ is the Way Maker becomes a declaration that present circumstances do not have the final word.

The Christological significance of the image is therefore primarily functional. Christ is presented as the one who acts. He does not merely possess divine status; He exercises divine power for the benefit of humanity.

This interpretation is consistent with Ogunlana and Akano's observation that functional Christology is prominent in contemporary African Christianity (Ogunlana and Akano 2022). Christ's identity is experienced through His activity. The believer encounters Christ as the one who opens doors, provides direction, delivers from difficulties, and creates a future beyond present limitations.

The image also resonates with African theological understandings of Christ as Liberator and Reconstructor. The Way Maker creates a path through situations of bondage and restores possibilities that have been destroyed by suffering. The image is consequently broader than material prosperity: it includes spiritual, emotional, relational, and social transformation.

The song's repeated affirmation that God is present in the midst of difficulty reinforces this understanding. The Way Maker is not represented as a distant God who acts only in the remote future. Divine action is understood as present. This sense of divine immanence is a significant feature of African religious consciousness and helps explain the emotional power of the song within African Christian worship.

Thus, Christ as Way Maker represents an experiential Christology in which Jesus is understood as actively present in the believer's struggles. The metaphor communicates hope, agency, divine companionship, and the possibility of transformation. Analysing Christ as the 'Way Maker' requires a critical look at how this path is discerned by the faith community. As Agbo et al.

contend, a severe challenge in contemporary African spirituality is the lack of hermeneutical balance, where subjective human interpretation often overrides scriptural boundaries. Therefore, the Christological confession of Christ making a way must be grounded in enduring biblical doctrine rather than the volatile, unverified declarations of charismatic figures (Agbo et al. 2026).

### **(ii) Christ as Promise Keeper**

The second major Christological model examined in the song is Christ as Promise Keeper. The expression presents Christ as faithful, dependable, and trustworthy.

The concept of promise has deep religious significance in African societies. Ambrose et al. demonstrate the importance of pledges and vows within African traditional religious contexts (Ambrose et al. 2021). Promises and vows can express commitment between individuals and the spiritual world and may be connected to the desire for protection, prosperity, avoidance of calamity, and continued well-being.

Against this background, “Promise Keeper” communicates an important theological contrast. Human beings may make promises and fail to fulfill them, but God is presented as absolutely dependable. The song therefore establishes divine faithfulness as the basis for Christian hope.

The expression is also meaningful within contemporary African social and political experience. Citizens frequently encounter unfulfilled promises in public life.

Political campaigns may be characterized by commitments concerning employment, security, infrastructure, economic development, and social welfare. When such commitments are not fulfilled, public confidence in leadership is weakened.

The theological confession that Christ is the “Promise Keeper” can therefore be interpreted as more than a private declaration of faith. It expresses a longing for a form of trustworthy authority that contrasts with human experiences of disappointment.

However, the political dimension should be treated carefully. The song itself does not explicitly address political leadership. Rather, its emphasis on divine faithfulness can provide a theological resource for reflecting on the ethical character of human leadership. If Christ is regarded as the model of faithfulness, Christian leaders are challenged to embody integrity, reliability, and responsibility.

Within African Christology, therefore, Christ as Promise Keeper corresponds with the broader understanding of Jesus as one who sustains and protects His people. The emphasis is not primarily on abstract attributes but on the practical consequences of divine faithfulness.

The song’s refrain transforms this description into confession: the worshipper does not merely make a theological statement about God’s faithfulness but identifies personally with the God being described. Christological knowledge is consequently integrated with worship and lived experience.

### **(iii) Christ as Mender of Hearts: A Restorative and Potter Motif**

The third image, mending of the heart, introduces the theme of restoration. A broken heart represents emotional, spiritual, relational, and existential woundedness. The image therefore expands the song's Christology beyond external circumstances to the inner life of the believer.

The song repeatedly affirms God's presence as one who touches, heals, turns lives around, and mends every heart. These recurring lines establish healing and restoration as central dimensions of the divine activity portrayed in the song.

Abobade's discussion of divine healing in the Nigerian Christian context is relevant here (Abobade 2025). He emphasizes that Christian healing should be understood within a broader framework of restored relationship with God and holistic well-being. Healing is not merely the removal of physical disease; it can signify restoration of the person in relationship with God and the wider community.

This broader understanding fits the imagery of mending every heart. The heart can symbolize the emotional and spiritual centre of human experience. A mended heart therefore represents restoration after suffering, disappointment, grief, rejection, betrayal, or spiritual crisis.

The image can also be read in relation to the biblical potter-clay motif. Scripture repeatedly uses the image of God as potter and humanity as clay to communicate

divine sovereignty, creativity, formation, and restoration. Isaiah 64:8 declares that believers are the clay and God is the potter, the work of God's own hand (Isa. 64:8, NIV).

Strictly speaking, the word "potter" does not occur in "Way Maker." It is therefore more appropriate to describe Christ as Potter as an interpretive theological extension of the song's image of mending, rather than as a claim about the song's explicit vocabulary. The metaphor remains useful because pottery involves the skilled shaping, reshaping, and restoration of material into a functional vessel.

From this perspective, Christ as Mender of Hearts may be understood as the divine craftsman who restores damaged lives. The image communicates intentionality and skill: God does not merely observe human brokenness; God acts upon it.

This interpretation resonates with African Christology because brokenness is often understood relationally and communally. The suffering of one person may affect the family, kinship group, congregation, or wider community. Restoration therefore has both personal and communal dimensions.

The Christological significance of mending every heart consequently lies in its presentation of Christ as healer and restorer. Christ engages wounded human beings and brings them toward wholeness. Such an understanding corresponds with African Christian expectations of a Christ who participates actively in human suffering.

## **Discussion: "Way Maker" and African Functional Christology**

The three images examined in this study reveal a coherent theological pattern. "Way Maker," "Promise Keeper," and "Mender of Hearts" are not isolated descriptions. Together, they present a Christology centred on divine presence, intervention, faithfulness, healing, and restoration.

The song's Christology is predominantly functional and experiential. It does not attempt to resolve classical theological questions concerning Christ's two natures, the relationship between Christ's humanity and divinity, or the metaphysical formulation of the Trinity. Instead, it asks a practical theological question: What does the presence of God mean in the life of a suffering believer?

The answer is expressed through the song's metaphors. God makes a way, keeps promises, heals hearts, changes lives, performs miracles, and shines in darkness. These are functional descriptions, but they are not theologically superficial; they represent the ways in which believers experience divine salvation.

The song also reflects an important characteristic of African Christian spirituality: the integration of spiritual and everyday existence. Religious experience is not restricted to an isolated sacred sphere. The divine is understood as relevant to illness, family life, economic challenges, emotional pain, uncertainty, and personal aspirations.

This helps explain why the song has acquired such widespread appeal. Its theological language is simple enough for congregational participation while its metaphors are sufficiently broad to accommodate different experiences of suffering and hope.

Furthermore, the song demonstrates the relationship between African theology and lived religion. Academic theology may formulate Christological models in systematic categories, but ordinary Christians frequently encounter theological concepts through preaching, testimony, prayer, and music. Songs such as “Way Maker” provide a bridge between theological reflection and religious experience.

The study therefore supports the argument that African gospel music deserves greater scholarly attention as a source of theological data. To dismiss popular gospel songs as merely devotional or emotional would overlook their role in shaping Christian beliefs. The repeated singing of a theological statement can make that statement part of the worshipper’s religious imagination.

At the same time, contextual Christological analysis must avoid romanticizing African culture or assuming that all African Christians interpret songs identically. Africa is religiously, culturally, linguistically, and denominationally diverse. The categories used in this study should therefore be understood as interpretive possibilities rather than universal descriptions of African Christianity.

## **Implications for Contemporary African Christianity**

The analysis of “Way Maker” has several implications for African Christian theology and worship.

First, African gospel music should be recognized as a legitimate source of theological reflection. Songs are not merely supplementary to theological education; they participate in the formation of Christian consciousness and can preserve and transmit Christological ideas.

Second, contextual Christology should maintain a relationship between cultural relevance and Christian theological integrity. African categories can enrich Christian understanding when they illuminate rather than distort the Christian confession concerning Christ.

Third, the song demonstrates the continuing significance of functional Christology. Many African Christians seek a faith that addresses concrete realities. The Christ who heals, restores, guides, protects, and creates possibilities is particularly meaningful within contexts characterized by uncertainty and suffering.

Fourth, the image of Christ as Promise Keeper has implications for Christian ethics and leadership. The faithfulness attributed to Christ should challenge Christian leaders to practise integrity, accountability, and responsible stewardship. The theological value of the metaphor is therefore not restricted to private spirituality.

Fifth, the image of Christ as Mender of Hearts highlights the importance of holistic pastoral care. Churches should recognize emotional and relational brokenness as legitimate areas of pastoral concern. Worship,

counselling, prayer, community support, and appropriate professional services can work together in promoting human flourishing.

Finally, the popularity of “Way Maker” demonstrates the capacity of African Christian creativity to contribute to global Christianity. The song originated within Nigerian gospel culture but has been embraced in diverse Christian communities internationally. This movement from local expression to global reception demonstrates that contextual theology need not be provincial: a theological expression rooted in a particular African experience can communicate dimensions of Christian faith that are meaningful beyond Africa.

## **Conclusion**

This study has examined the African Christological significance of Sinach’s “Way Maker,” focusing on the images of Christ as Way Maker, Promise Keeper, and Mender of Hearts. The analysis demonstrates that the song provides a significant example of contemporary African functional and experiential Christology.

As Way Maker, Christ is portrayed as the one who creates possibilities in situations of difficulty and apparent impossibility. As Promise Keeper, Christ represents divine reliability, faithfulness, and trustworthiness in contrast to the uncertainties associated with human commitments. As Mender of Hearts, Christ is presented as healer and restorer who engages emotional, spiritual, and relational brokenness.

These images resonate with major emphases within African Christology, particularly its concern with the practical relevance of Christ to human existence. The song portrays a Christ who is not distant from human suffering but present within it: divine presence is experienced as active intervention.

The study also demonstrates the value of gospel music as a source for theological research. Contemporary African songs function as forms of popular theology through which biblical ideas are interpreted, contextualized, memorized, and performed. As such, African Christology should not be studied only through theological publications and formal doctrinal statements; it should also be investigated through the songs, prayers, testimonies, sermons, and worship practices through which African Christians express their faith.

“Way Maker” ultimately presents a Christology of presence, possibility, faithfulness, healing, and restoration. Its significance lies in its ability to connect Christian confession with lived experience. The song therefore contributes to the continuing task of articulating an African Christology that is culturally meaningful, pastorally relevant, and faithful to the Christian faith.

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